

Supply

Mr. Wise: The twelfth area deals with dairy policy. We hear all kinds of rumours about the future of the national dairy policy. I would be the first person to go on record and indicate that that policy has worked extremely well over the last ten years for both consumers and producers alike. I want to make it very clear that we stand fully committed to the continuation of that dairy policy. We expanded the dairy policy with specific emphasis on the export side. Can the minister, in view of the rumours that are going across the country—I know that producers and producers' organizations are calling members of Parliament in all parties and from all sections of the country—give the assurance that the national dairy policy will in fact continue to receive support at the same level in the future?

I know my time is running rather short, Mr. Chairman. I have touched on only a few of the problems facing the agricultural industry. My colleagues will touch on some of these in more detail during the course of the next two days, and on other issues as well.

The sad and disappointing fact is that, as far as this minister is concerned, and as far as this government is concerned, there is often a recognition of these problems. They do not ignore them; they do recognize them. Usually there is some plan of action or an intense signal to the industry, and false hopes are given. Unfortunately, too often no action is ever taken. The minister indicated in his opening remarks that he would welcome the opportunity to respond to these questions.

If you assess the promises made and the promises kept by this minister and by this government, a very dismal record is revealed. I regret to say this minister, who represents the most important segment of our whole society, this minister who is supported by a most capable departmental staff—in fact I would say the capabilities of the staff of Agriculture Canada are second to none when we compare them to other people in other branches of the public service, and I speak from experience and I make no reservations in placing that on the public record—referring strictly to the record the minister succeeds only at one thing, and that is failure. That disappoints me very much.

It is the official opposition who feel strongly about agriculture and the agricultural food industry. We had no difficulty convincing our caucus members that we should set aside two days in the House of Commons to talk about the problems, and to try to work together to do something about them.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Chairman, I just came from the Canadian Agriculture Outlook Conference and it was a slightly different atmosphere. I never attended such a positive meeting and met such a group of happy farm leaders from all over Canada, from one coast to the other. It was the most productive and positive meeting they have attended. They look toward 1980 and future years with optimism. The hon. member, the former Minister of Agriculture, makes remarks about research. We have not let down research at all, and it is holding its own. I wish I could say the same for all other branches of the

department. We have been accused of spending too much money.

When he talks of high interest rates, let us look at some of the facts. He said we have not done anything and that we have been successful at failure. Right in his own community I bet he has neighbours who have interest-free loans, advanced loans on crops in store—

The Chairman: I regret to interrupt the minister. He may continue with unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

[*Translation*]

The Chairman: There is no unanimous consent. I must interrupt the minister.

Mr. Ostiguy: Mr. Chairman, I would like to outline very briefly the prospects for Canadian agriculture during the eighties. Most people will recognize the importance of agriculture for the Canadian economy as concerns income, job creation and commercial value both for domestic trade and our dealings with other countries. Indeed, the spill-over effects of the primary sector of agricultural production on our economy as a whole are so numerous that it is nearly impossible to define them or make a complete list of them. Even so, Mr. Chairman, I would like to give a brief analysis of the impact of agriculture on our economy by giving a short outline of the situation and by trying to forecast what the future holds for us during the next decade.

In the past, agriculture was mostly considered a way of life. Before World War II, more than one-third of the Canadian population lived in a rural environment. At the time, there was a very diversified subsistence agriculture which aimed at meeting first the needs of rural families and second those of local and regional markets. The processing sectors in the field of food products were mostly primary sectors. They included small businesses which depended on local resources and which produced only for their own area. Their activities were limited to primary processing of basic food products such as flour, butter and bread. Each community had its dairy, its flourmill, its bakery, its small grocery store; the milkman was also a local producer. Today, Mr. Chairman, the situation has changed considerably. Agriculture has become a specialized industry, the first link in the agri-food business chain, which meets the specific needs of a society that has evolved tremendously in the last 40 years.

● (1600)

Farmers represent less than 5 per cent of the Canadian population today; however, mechanization has made up for the decrease in the farming, in the rural community. Concurrently with the advent of mechanization, research developed new